



## THE ROLE OF RESEARCH COOPERATION IN UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONALIZATION

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**Abstract:** *International research cooperation is highly valued by universities and colleges worldwide, and its benefits are evident. Based on an exploratory survey, this paper examines the perspectives, values, and approaches to international research cooperation of university leadership and management staff with significant internationalization experience. The qualitative data were collected using questionnaires administered through face-to-face interviews or completed online or via e-mail. The findings show that universities engaged in research collaboration as part of their internationalization efforts also benefit from other activities such as international student and staff exchanges. This study contributes to university internationalization research by providing insights into practical experiences in international research cooperation.*

**JEL classification:** M31, M37

**Key words:** international research cooperation, qualitative research, university internationalization, education marketing, higher education

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific research collaboration in the internationalization of universities is undergoing rapid development. With the increasing trend of globalization, more universities are placing emphasis on and actively engaging in international collaboration to broaden their research scope, enhance research quality, and drive academic innovation.

Currently, the forms of scientific research collaboration have become more diversified, ranging from traditional academic exchanges and personnel visits to joint participation in international cooperative projects, establishment of joint laboratories or research centers,



collaborative graduate student training, and sharing of scientific research data resources. These various forms demonstrate the depth and breadth of scientific research collaboration in the process of internationalization.

Such scientific research collaboration not only enables universities to stay abreast of the latest international scientific research trends and findings but also brings additional research funding and support to universities. By closely collaborating with high-level scientific research institutions and teams abroad, universities can leverage international advanced scientific research concepts and methodologies to enhance their research capabilities and innovation. Furthermore, this collaboration facilitates exchanges and integration between universities and the international community across various sectors such as culture, education, and economy, injecting fresh momentum into the internationalization efforts of universities.

In order to illustrate real situations, conclude valuable experiences, and methods of international research cooperation in universities, it is crucial to survey experienced university leadership, management teams, and experts. Thus, a qualitative research was designed to find answers to the following research question: What are the opinions of university management specialists from different countries about the role of the international research cooperation in improving the internationalization of higher education? The findings reveal that international research is crucial for every university and the cooperation with other universities in such projects can contribute to an increasing exchange of students and academic staff with beneficial effects for the university's internationalization goals.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Globalization and internationalization are prominent themes in higher education research, underscoring the contrast between pragmatic and idealistic views of higher education (Tight, 2021). The increasing international academic exchanges, enhancing overseas student exchange programs, and promoting cooperative research and joint educational initiatives are among the main trends in the internationalization of higher education (Liu, 2001). Li (2013) encompasses eight elements of internationalization in higher education: school philosophy, cross-border education, organizational structure and support, curriculum delivery, teacher exchange, student mobility, distinctive projects, and research collaboration. The literature highlights that according to some university foreign affairs



managers, university internationalization encompasses six aspects: internationalization of running the school, university international development, international talent training goals, internationalization of teachers and administrators, internationalization of students, and internationalization of research (Tang, 2007). Dirk van Dammed (2001) states that higher education internationalization encompasses personnel flow, establishment of branch campuses, cooperative research, mutual recognition agreements, internationalization of university courses, communication networks, and distance education. Other studies aim to integrate all levels of actions in universities, departments, disciplines, and majors, with each step of university teaching, scientific research, and social service (Wit, 2002).

This process involves incorporating international elements into the research, teaching, and administrative activities of higher education institutions using modern digital technologies in a unified virtual academic space (Kobzhev et al., 2020). Collaborating with international partners in global research projects is the primary focus of research and academic justification (Taskoh, 2020). In addition, the using of technology innovation can potentiate the outputs of these research projects (Tseng et al., 2020). The researchers argue that public discontent alone is not a significant challenge to international institutions (de Vries et al., 2021) and that collaborative research initiatives should be based on sound strategies, including actions to reduce risks and uncertainties (Trogisch et al., 2020). Among these actions, the security of information to ensure the safety of data in universities and scientific research plays an important role (Le, 2021).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To find the answers to the research question, a qualitative research in the form of an exploratory survey was conducted. The survey covered a broader objective meant to find the main coordinates of international partnerships between universities. To achieve the objective of this research a specific open question was used in the questionnaire: *“In your understanding, what are the successful experiences of research cooperation in international cooperation between universities and colleges? What are the issues that need attention?”* The sample included university presidents, vice presidents, deans, directors, and senior experts responsible for university internationalization efforts. Through previous contacts, recommendations, international fairs, and online surveys, the research gathered 30 qualified



respondents from 14 countries, consisting of 2 professors, 6 senior education officers, 6 directors or deans, 7 presidents or vice presidents, and 9 senior international cooperation experts.

This exploratory survey utilized three primary methods for data collection: face-to-face interviews, emails, and WeChat. It is evident that university staff outside of China prefer email for surveys, which typically takes around 3 to 4 weeks to receive feedback. Instead, university staff in China prefers using WeChat for communication, with surveys usually taking 1 to 2 weeks to receive feedback. Both email and WeChat surveys successfully obtained all the answers to the interview questionnaires. However, face-to-face interviews provided additional information beyond the questionnaires, offering a more comprehensive understanding. Interviews conducted in office settings or official meetings tended to be more formal, yielding brief and official responses, whereas interviews in relaxed environments such as coffee bars led to more open interviewees who were willing to share more ideas and provide comprehensive answers.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the interview recording, the general opinions reveal that successful experience of international research cooperation, the attraction of win-win results, and a focus on long-term outcomes and proper planning are key-success factors. Among the respondents' answers, three main aspects were revealed, which should characterize the international research cooperation between universities. They are presented below.

##### *Managerial strategies and actions*

Survey participants highlighted that managerial strategies and top management involvement are mandatory to ensure the success of international research projects. Given the diverse conditions and environments of international research collaborations, it is crucial to address various issues, undertake thorough preparations, and ensure effective management throughout the entire process to avoid conflicts. In this sense, some of the participants mentioned the following:

*“It is imperative to focus on the ownership and management of technology, capital, and scientific and technological achievements.”*—Vice president in a university, China.



*“To mitigate potential conflicts and disputes, it is imperative to unequivocally define the ownership of scientific and technological achievements.”—Dean in a university, China.*

*“Professional foreign affairs personnel must excel in service coordination, ensuring meticulous attention to confidentiality reviews, the distribution and protection of intellectual property, and other intricate tasks. Addressing policy and professional issues necessitates the involvement of a specialized management team, which can assist the research group in completing relevant tasks in strict accordance with national laws and regulations, university policies, and their extensive experience.”—Dean in a university, China.*

To enhance the suitability of the involved research personnel for international research collaboration, the university must provide necessary support, such as training workshops and other activities, to improve their skills and professionalism. Thus an expert in university management mentioned:

*“Scientific research workshops are conducted to facilitate knowledge exchange and learning. Researchers must focus on enhancing their scientific research skills to effectively engage in international collaborations and exchanges.”—Expert in a university, China.*

In the same time, the universities should consider that international research cooperation takes place within the broad context of internationalization, making it more comprehensive and complex. To ensure the success of international research cooperation, numerous factors require special attention, some respondents mentioning:

*“ Given the necessity of conducting their own research, it is imperative that they receive adequate funding support from their respective schools.”—Director in a university, China.*

*“ In alignment with the school's development strategy, we will strategically introduce superior foreign resources to address the school's deficiencies.”—Dean in a university, China.*

*“When planning for the future, it is crucial to prioritize long-term objectives and develop comprehensive strategies rather than focusing on immediate, short-term gains.”—Expert in a university, China*

International research cooperation is increasingly prevalent, with numerous successful cases emerging alongside persistent failures. Effective management of international research cooperation within universities necessitates a concerted effort from the entire institution.

*Mutual understanding between partners*



To achieve successful outcomes in international research cooperation, mutual understanding among partners is fundamental. In this process, the university's commitment, vision, and mission towards international research cooperation are crucial.

*“Understanding each other’s inner workings, evaluate each other’s methods of instruction, examination, research etc.”*—Professor in a university, Germany.

*“Mutual trust and fully care and support are the main issues to decide the success of the program.”* —Vice president in a university, China.

*“Doing partnership and coordination between universities and colleges needs strong commitment, Vision, and mission towards the partnership between the 2 universities.”*—Director in a university, Indonesia.

The majority of respondents have agreed that to effectively manage international research cooperation, the university needs to identify the right partners, comprehend each other's internal processes, provide funding support, collaboratively apply for research projects, offer technical support from various perspectives, conduct frequent progress discussions, and evaluate each other's research methodologies. Establishing a scientific research cooperation platform is essential, with research workshops being the common form of collaboration. Mutual trust, stable policy environments, and effective leadership are also crucial factors. To prevent the failure of international research cooperation, the university must pay attention to the distribution of technology, capital, and scientific achievements, while continuously enhancing its own research capabilities.

The research cooperation should align with the university's strategic goals, address its deficiencies, and necessitate professional management, concluded the survey participant. In this sense, the following intervention of one of the participants is of great interest.

*“According to the development strategy of our university, we will purposefully introduce foreign superior resources to make up for the deficiency of our university. Professional foreign affairs staff will coordinate their services: they will do a good job of confidentiality review, assignment and protection of intellectual property rights and other details. For policy and professional problems, professional management teams are required to assist the research group to complete relevant work according to national laws and regulations, university policies and regulations and rich working experience, so as to effectively protect the intangible assets of the country and the university.”* —Dean in a university, China.



### *Quality of research projects*

The cooperation go together with economic development can have the sustainable outcomes, teaching quality and the education method need consideration, and sustainable outcomes mutual benefits deserve attentions.

*“The successful international cooperation needs the universities and colleges to ensure the teaching quality and the education method; ensure that cooperation activities contribute towards the fulfillment of the economic development and globalization progress”*—Vice President in a university, France.

The involvement of visiting professors can be essential in ensuring the quality of research projects, as they can be involved in research and teaching simultaneously.

*“The system of visiting professors can help a lot, as one university can invite specialists from a partner university to teach from one semester to a year or more in their study programs. ”*—Director in a university, Romania.

The participants emphasized that by ensuring a good quality of project activities, reliable research results can be obtained, which can be used as recommendations for the following applications to international projects.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

International collaboration in scientific research provides universities from various countries with extensive opportunities for cooperative endeavors, enabling the sharing of advanced research resources, cutting-edge technology, and specialized expertise. This accelerates the research process and collectively addresses global scientific challenges. Such collaboration also promotes the dissemination and exchange of research outcomes, facilitates the transformation and application of scientific and technological achievements, drives innovation, and injects new vitality into global economic development and social progress. Additionally, international scientific research collaboration in academia enhances academic exchanges and personnel training, offering students and researchers a broader international perspective and a platform for collaboration, thereby nurturing high-caliber talents with global competitiveness.





Taking into account the results of the present research, the answers to the research question about “*What are the opinions of university management specialists from different countries about the role of the international research cooperation in improving the internationalization of higher education?*” have been obtained. Thus, the management of higher education institutions must be fully involved in the development of international research projects, ensure a strong mutual collaboration with foreign partners and give priority to ensuring the quality of the projects.

As practical implications of this research results, it is revealed that the development of international scientific research cooperation in universities should focus on several key aspects. It is essential to clarify the objectives and directions of cooperation, ensuring alignment with national strategies and disciplinary development. Selecting high-quality partners with complementary advantages and shared research interests is crucial for achieving resource sharing and mutual benefits. Strengthening exchanges and visits between faculty and students promotes the exchange of academic ideas and contributes to personnel training. Establishing research platforms and bases can enhance the depth and quality of cooperation. Deepening project collaboration and research and development efforts will help jointly address key technical challenges. Promoting the transformation and application of research outcomes will maximize the value of scientific research. Optimizing cooperation mechanisms and management will improve the efficiency of collaboration. Increasing policy and financial support will provide a strong foundation for international cooperation. These measures will effectively advance the development of international scientific research cooperation in universities, enhancing their research innovation capabilities and international influence.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PLAGIARISM:** The authors declare no conflict of interest and plagiarism.

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